

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, dear guests,

It is my pleasure to welcome you all to the Swiss Residence this evening on the occasion of the gathering of Egon Zehnder partners from over 37 countries. Each year you meet in a different part of the world to analyse business trends, to discuss and build strategies, to share best practices and set future goals. This is the first time such a global partners' meeting is being held in India - without doubt a forward looking choice. India, from whichever perspective you look, business, culture, diversity, is a fascinating country - and very much part of our future. I am pleased to know that in the short time frame of 22 years, *Egon-Zehnder India* has achieved great success.

India is a country with high GDP growth and a strong economic reforms agenda with a focus on the creation of critical infrastructure. And to all of you present here, I don't have to say what a wealth of top talent and brilliant minds this country has to offer.

Naturally for us diplomats, an India posting is of tremendous interest – it is challenging, intense and engaging – on a daily basis. I have the privilege to lead a large official Swiss network here, in clear recognition of India's potential as a partner of ever growing importance. Let me therefore take advantage of this captive audience for a very brief "sales pitch" for what Switzerland does in India.

Over the last 18 months, there have been no less than three meetings at the highest level between the two countries. They include the State visit to India by President Doris Leuthard in late August 2017 and the working meeting, last week in Davos, between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Alain Berset. These substantive contacts are strong indicators of our intensifying relationship.

Trade and economics are at the heart of the relationship. Switzerland is the 11th investor in India and the more than 250 Swiss companies present in India, not least among them Egon Zehnder, have created 100'000 jobs. Negotiations are ongoing between the EFTA member States and India on the conclusion of a free trade agreement. Switzerland and India also strive to conclude a new Investment Protection Agreement. Such improved framework conditions would allow economic actors of both countries to explore up to now unused potential. Switzerland is also supporting India in its fight against corruption. On January 1st of this year, the bilateral agreement on the automatic exchange of information in tax matters entered into force.

The official Swiss network furthermore comprises several agencies responsible for specific tasks – the start-up scene, academia and Vocational Education and Training are covered by swissnex in Bangalore, trade and investment promotion by the Swiss Business Hub in Mumbai, climate change and energy efficiency by the Swiss Development Cooperation Office here in Delhi, tourism by Switzerland Tourism in Mumbai. We were very happy to register about 800'000 overnights by Indian citizens last year. The biggest Swiss visa centre worldwide is located in the back of this very compound.

It is my pleasure to welcome you on this site, which is our workplace and my temporary home. This 55 year old Embassy building was already 1 year old, when your company was founded in 1964. It is situated in Chanakypuri, a diplomatic area which was launched, soon after India's independence, by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. The building was designed and realized by architects Hans Hofmann and Walter Rüeegg. It is one of the architecturally and historically most significant Swiss Embassies. I always come to these gardens to gather new strength and inspiration. I hope they will have a similar effect on you. And – I can assure you - the brutalist, concrete architecture does grow on you with time.

You chose to join us during a very special year for Switzerland and India, because we are celebrating the 70th anniversary of the signing of the Swiss–Indian Treaty of Friendship. It was one of the first such treaties signed by independent India. With our initiative called "*Connecting Minds – Inspiring the Future*", generously supported by corporate sponsors, we aim to further strengthen our bilateral relations, by showcasing the innovative, future oriented elements of both countries, literally bringing together young minds.

Ladies and gentlemen, I very much looked forward to this event, which I expect to set up a new gold standard for our Swiss Residence, which has already featured in Bollywood movies. I wish you an enjoyable evening and continued success in the coming years. Thank you.